

Message Text

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16

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 IO-10 OMB-01 SAM-01 SAB-01 /084 W

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R 071610Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8415

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1394

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: VISIT TO TUNISIA OF IRAQI VICE PRESIDENT

SADDAM HUSSEIN

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REF: TUNIS 1315 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. IRAQI VICE PRESIDENT SADDAM HUSSEIN'S CURRENT VISIT TO TUNISIA IS REGARDED BY TUNISIANS AS EVIDENCE OF GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND PRAGMATISM IN IRAQI FOREIGN POLICY. GOT INTENDS TO CAPITALIZE ON HUSSEIN'S VISIT TO ENCOURAGE THIS TREND, PERHAPS INCLUDING SEEKING TO PERSUADE IRAQIS TO RESUME DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH U.S. END SUMMARY.

2. SADDAM HUSSEIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF IRAQI REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, ARRIVED IN TUNIS TODAY, MARCH 7, FOR VISIT OF TWO DAYS. HUSSEIN'S VISIT TO TUNISIA WAS ARRANGED SOME TIME AGO BUT DATE WAS ADVANCED IN ORDER TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO COMBINE HIS TRIP TO TUNISIA WITH OPEC MEETING IN ALGIERS.

3. LOCAL TUNISIAN PRESS QUOTES TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR TO BAGHDAD ZOUHEIR CHELLY AS SAYING HUSSEIN IS AN ADVOCATE OF A "NEW STYLE" IN IRAQI POLITICS. FRENCH LANGUAGE DAILY, LA PRESS, CHARACTERIZES HUSSEIN AS ONE OF TWO PRINCIPAL ARCHITECTS (OTHER BEING PRESIDENT HASSAN AL BAKR) OF NEW IRAQI POLICY LAUNCHED IN LAST FEW YEARS OF "OPENING TO THE EXTERNAL WORLD AND ESPECIALLY TO THE ARAB COUNTRIES". EDITORIAL IN ARABIC-LANGUAGE DAILY, AL AMAL, NOTES THAT TUNISIA AND IRAQ HAVE STOOD APART FOR SOME YEARS AS A RESULT OF "A MISINTERPRETATION OF EACH OTHERS ATTITUDES" BUT THE TWO NATIONS HAVE ENTERED "A NEW PHASE IN RELATIONS".

4. HUSSEIN MET WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA THIS MORNING, FOLLOWED BY PRESIDENTIAL LUNCH IN HIS HONOR, AND SECOND MEETING BETWEEN THESE TWO LEADERS IS SCHEDULED FOR SUNDAY. MEANWHILE, MEETINGS ARE ALSO SCHEDULED WITH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AND OTHER TOP TUNISIAN OFFICIALS. AMBASSADOR IS INVITED TO DINNER GIVEN IN SADDAM'S HONOR BY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI EVENING MARCH 9.

5. COMMENT

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A. IN PAST YEAR SEVERAL TOP TUNISIAN OFFICIALS, - INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA, HAVE EXPRESSED VIEW TO ME THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN -- ONCE REALISTICALLY LABELED THE BUTCHER OF BAGHDAD -- HAS CHANGED HIS COLORS. PRIME MINISTER TOLD ME THAT AT RABAT CONFERENCE LAST OCTOBER HE HAS FOUND HUSSEIN UNDERSTANDING AND PRAGMATIC. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI INFORMED ME THAT HUSSEIN HAS ALSO MADE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON HIM AND SEEMED TO BE

ACTING AS A STATESMAN. HAVING EXPERIENCED STRAINED RELATIONS WITH IRAQ FOR SO MANY YEARS, PUNCTUATED BY IRAQI REFUSAL TO RECEIVE PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA IN 1965, TUNISIANS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED WITH WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS IRAQI POLICY SHIFT. CHATTI TOLD ME YESTERDAY THAT IRAQI EMISSARIES HAVE INFORMED TUNISIANS THAT THEY NOW APPRECIATE THE CORRECTNESS OF TUNISIAN FOREIGN POLICY, INCLUDING IN PARTICULAR TUNISIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD PALESTINIAN QUESTION. CHATTI SAID FURTHER THAT IRAQIS ACCORD GREAT IMPORTANCE TO SADDAM'S VISIT TO TUNISIA BECAUSE IRAQIS RECOGNIZE TUNISIA IS MODERATE AND PRO-WESTERN, AND THAT GOT PLAYS NO TRICKS IN ITS DIPLOMACY.

B. DURING SADDAM HUSSEIN'S VISIT TO TUNISIA GOT, WHICH CHERISHES ITS SELF-IMAGE AS A MATCHMAKER, MAY POSSIBLY SEEK TO PERSUADE HUSSEIN THAT IRAQ SHOULD RESUME RELATIONS WITH U.S. AS IN CASE OF MINISTER OF HEALTH MZALI (REFTEL), CHATTI AFFIRMS THAT HE HAS BEEN TOLD UNOFFICIALLY BY IRAQIS THAT REASON FOR IRAQI NON-RENEWAL OF RELATIONS WITH U.S. IS ALLEGED U.S. SUPPORT FOR KURDISH REBELLION IN IRAQ. WHEN IN MY CONVERSATION WITH CHATTI I CATEGORICALLY DENIED U.S. INVOLVEMENT WITH KURDS, CHATTI SAID HE INTENDED TO PASS THIS ON TO SADDAM.

C. WHETHER OR NOT GOT RAISES WITH HUSSEIN RESUMPTION OF IRAQI RELATIONS WITH U.S., TUNISIAN OFFICIALS INTEND TO ENCOURAGE WHAT THEY CONSIDER TO BE AN IRAQI FOREIGN POLICY SHIFT IN DIRECTION OF GREATER PRAGMATISM AND FLEXIBILITY. WHILE, AS CHATTI HAS INDICATED TO ME, TUNISIANS ARE FULLY AWARE OF IRAQ GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO HARSH AND STRICT PARTY IDEOLOGY, THEY SEE

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IRAQI DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH TUNISIA AS OPPORTUNITY FOR GOT TO EXERCISE CONSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE ON THIS BA'THIST REGIME.
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